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THE BAY AND TOWN OF BANNOW.

NO. I.

BY THE REV. JAMES GRAVES.

[Read at the Meeting of September 4th.]

Nothing has tended so much to throw discredit on the study of Irish antiquities and history, as the exaggerated tone assumed by Irish antiquaries and historians of a certain class; and as this mischievous spirit of exaggeration has spread its baneful influence into almost every branch of Irish antiquities, so there are few localities of historic interest which have not in like manner suffered from it. For example, Bannow on the coast of Wexford, the site of an extinct municipality once of considerable importance, and possessing, besides, a lasting interest to the student of Irish history as that spot of Irish ground where the English invader first set foot, has, by writers of the class to which I have alluded, been dignified with the sounding title of "the Irish Herculanium." Their imaginative minds have pictured to themselves, and described to others, a populous town with its houses, public buildings, nay, its very inhabitants, buried beneath the irresistible advance of the drifting sands of the ocean. Such a course of proceeding can alone have the effect of producing disappointment when the naked truth is discovered; and the inquiring mind often turns away in disgust from a study where no firm footing can apparently be obtained, and everything seems as unstable as the shifting sands of the Bannow catastrophe. Such were the thoughts which forcibly obtruded themselves during a recent visit to Bannow and its vicinity; and in the observations—the result of personal examination—which I now venture to submit to the Society, I trust there will, at all events, be found little of that exaggerating propensity, which seems to be the besetting sin of the class of writers to which I have alluded.

A glance at the map of Ireland will show that the estuary of Bannow deeply indents the coast of the barony of Bargy, some twenty-four miles south of the town of Wexford. When the tide has flowed to its full height, the eye of a spectator from the most elevated point of Bannow Island, rests on what appears to be a noble and well sheltered harbour of refuge, placed exactly where most required, namely, at the bottom of that dangerous bay embraced by the Saltees and the point of Hook promontory. But this promise of a harbour of refuge is most delusive, as the wreck of many a noble vessel yearly testifies. When the tide has ebbed, the spectator beholds but a few winding shallow channels, and a small expanse of deep water adjoining Bannow Island, surrounded on every side by thousands of acres of sand and sludge; whilst a highly

dangerous bar, locally termed "the Bull," on which a fearful sea breaks in rough weather, renders access difficult even to the scanty anchorage existing within the shelter of the island.

An examination of the locality clearly proves, however, that such a state of things cannot always have existed. Indeed, there are pretty clear indications of two great changes having taken place here. The first of these may either be accounted for by the sinking of the land or the rising of the sea-level. Indications of this fact, however startling the proposition may seem, abound along the east coast of Ireland. At Tramore Bay, *beneath the strand,* lies a deep stratum of peat, embracing the roots of trees in their natural position—and the tradition of the locality is, that at some remote period the sea made a further irruption into the "Back Strand." At Duncannon strand, on the coast of Wexford, the same *phenomena* are apparent. A similar observation holds good also of the strand of Fethard. Whether caused by the sinking of the land, therefore, or the rising of the sea, it does not appear to me as assuming too much to suppose that a safe and noble harbour was in remote ages formed at Bannow; defended at its mouth from south-westerly winds (the only point to which it lay exposed) by what was then, not only in name but in reality, an island of considerable size, still known as "the Island of Bannow," although now scarcely ever insulated even by the highest tides.

The second change I have already glanced at; namely, the gradual accumulation of sand and gravel, deposited by wind and tide within the harbour, whereby it has become, in effect, obliterated, or at least rendered totally useless in a commercial point of view. The natural causes of this accumulation, whether arising from marine currents, or the set of the tidal wave, or both combined, had no doubt been at work for centuries before the period of authentic written history. But we are not required to refer to so distant a period for the silting up of Bannow Bay. The east coast of England, as well as the eastern sea-board of Ireland, afford many examples in point. The Isle of Thanet in Kent, now, like Bannow Island, a portion of the main land, was within the historic period separated therefrom by a deep and navigable arm of the sea. In the year 360, Lupicinus, a Roman commander, sailed through this channel, as the most direct and safest way from Boulogne to the mouth of the Thames. A.D. 600, or thereabouts, St. Augustine entered it, and landing near Sarre, proceeded to Canterbury : and four hundred and fifty years after, in 1052, Harold's fleet, having plundered the east coast of Kent, passed through these inland waters, which Bede describes, as being, in his time, about three furlongs broad. This channel, called the Wantsum, continued navigable for ships of considerable burden in the reign of Henry VIII.; and yet, at the present day, a pedestrian may leave the island at Sarre, or any point thereabout, without perceiving where the island begins or ends. Similar causes have obliterated nearly all the Cinque Ports, whose "Barons" were bound to furnish the Royal Navy of our Edwards and Henries.

It cannot then be assuming too much to suppose, that, at the period of the Anglo-Norman invasion in the reign of Henry II., Bannow Bay was counted a safe harbour, and known as such, amongst the mariners of the opposite English coast. Here the five Welch vessels, which carried the little army of Robert Fitz-Stephen, Myler Fitz-Henry, Milo Fitz-David, Harvey de Montmaurice, and Maurice de Prendergast, the *avant couriers* of Strongbow, cast anchor in May, A.D. 1169.—The story of their landing at Bag-an-bun, and there entrenching themselves, seems to be a mere myth without the slightest foundation. Giraldus Cambrensis calls the place of their landing *Insula Banuensis,* and leads his readers clearly to understand that the position was by no means strong, although the insular form of the place gave it a certain degree of security :—" Cum igitur in Insula Banuensi subductis se navibus recepissent, nunciis ad Dermicium missis, nonnulli ex partibus maritimis confluxerunt." *Expugn. Hib.* c. 3, pp. 761, 762. The Norman-French rhymer agrees with Giraldus Cambrensis in his account of the landing of the expedition—calling the place of disembarkation *la Banne.* His account is as follows :—

> " A la Banne arivèrent
> Od tant de gent cum erent.
> Quant il furent arivez,
> E erent tuz issuz de nefs,
> Lur gent firent herbeger
> Sur la rive de la mer."

> At the Banne arrived they
> With all their followers as they were.
> When they had brought-to,
> And had all disembarked,
> They caused their men to lodge
> Hard by the sea-shore.

The chronicler proceeds to state that a messenger was despatched to Dermod Mac Murrough to inform him of the advent of his Norman allies. The king arrived at their *bivouac* next morning. He was over-joyed to see them, and gave them a most courteous reception. They remained at Bannow that night :—

> " Icele nuit demorèrent
> Sur la rive ù il erent;
> Mès li reis lendemain
> Vers Weiseford trestut à plein
> Ala tant tost, sanz mentir,
> Pur la vile asaillir."

> That night they tarried
> By the shore as they were :

But the King, on the morrow,
Marched directly to Wexford,
Accompanied by all—
Of a verity, to assault the town.

<div align="right">Michel's Conquest of Ireland, pp. 23, 24.</div>

The invaders, then, had no time or need to surround themselves with the elaborate fosses and ramparts which still exist on Bag-an-bun point, and which should be referred, I have no doubt, to the primæval inhabitants of the country, as many entrenchments of a similar nature may be traced along the coasts of Wexford and Waterford. Thus we have heard the testimony of the two earliest historians of the Conquest of Ireland; the former of whom may be said to represent the Norman party, whilst the latter expressly says that he was furnished with the facts by the interpreter of King Dermod :—

" Par soen demeine latinier
Que moi conta de lui l'estorie,
Dunt faz ici la mèmorie.
Morice Regan iert celui,
Buche à buche parla à lui
Ki cest jest endita,
L'estorie de lui me mostra.
Icil Morice iert latinier,
Al rei Dermot, ke mult l'out cher."

By his own interpreter,
Who related to me the history of him,
Of which I here make memorial.
Maurice Regan was he,
I, who indited this history
Spoke mouth to mouth with him,
Who showed me the history of him.
This Maurice was interpreter
To King Dermod, who loved him much.

<div align="right">Ib., p. 1.</div>

All subsequent English historians have merely repeated, more or less correctly, the statements of Giraldus Cambrensis and the Norman rhymer. And our " Irish Livy," as honest though often credulous Geoffry Keating has, not undeservedly, been termed, seems to have based his account of the landing of Fitz-Stephen at Bag-an-bun on the distich given by Hanmer, who, writing about the end of the 16th or commencement of the 17th century, states that the Normans landed at " the Bann," and remarks that " hereupon the rime runneth :—

' At the creeke of Bagganbun
Ireland was lost and wonne.' "

It must be confessed that the sequence is not very apparent. Keat-

ing's statement is as follows, extracted from a beautiful copy of his History of Ireland, by Ferfeasa O'Duibhgheanainn, A.D. 1646, and preserved in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin (H. 5. 22, fol. 130, *b*) :—

"Ɗála Roɩbeɼɒ mɩc Sτɩoḃna τáɩnɩc ɒo coṁall aɲ ȝeallaɒ τuȝ ɒo Ⱥ)ac Ⱥ)uɼchaɒa, aȝaɼ aɼ e lɩoɲ ɼluaɩȝ τáɩnɩc leɩɼ a ɲ-Єɩɼɩɲɲ τɼɩoċa [Rɩɒɼɼe], aȝaɼ ɼeaɼca Scuɩḃeɼ, aȝaɼ τɼɩ ċeɒ τɼoɩȝċeaċ, aȝaɼ aɼ e aɩτ ɩɲaɼ ȝaḃaɒaɼ τɩɼ ɩ ȝ-Cuaɲ aɲ Bhaɩɲḃ a ɲ-ɩomal Coɲɒae Loċa Ȝaɼman, ɼaɲ aɩτ ɼe ɼáɩɒτeɼ Beaȝ-aɲ-Buɲ. Ⱥȝaɼ ɼa h-e aoɩɼ aɲ Tɩȝeaɼɲa aɲ τaɲ ɼoɩɲ, 1170, aȝaɼ aɲ ɼeaċτṁaɒ blɩaɒaɩɲ ɒo ɼlaɩτɩoɼ Ruaɩɒɼɩ Uɩ Coɲċoḃaɩɼ."

As regards Robert Fitz-Stephen, he came to fulfil his engagements to Mac Murrough, and the number of troops that came with him to Ireland were 30 knights, 60 esquires, and 300 footmen; and they landed in the harbour of the *Banbh,* on the coast of the County of Wexford, at a place called *Beag-an-Bun.* The year of the Lord at that time was 1170, and the seventh of Roderick O'Connor's reign.

Both the Annals of the Four Masters, and of Innisfallen, agree in assigning the above date to the entry of the English into Ireland; but they do not state particulars. Dr. O'Conor, in a note appended to the passage in the Annals of Innisfallen, assumes 1169 as the true date. *Rer. Hib. Scriptores,* Tom. II., p. 114.

On the whole, then, it would appear that Giraldus Cambrensis and the Norman writer of the Conquest of Ireland afford the only genuine account we possess of the landing of Fitz-Stephen; and I have shewn that their account can refer solely to Bannow. The passage from Keating is curious, as affording the etymology of its name. Cuaɲ-aɲ-Baɩɲḃ *(Cuan-an-Bhainbh),* means the Bay of *Banbh. Banbh* is a name proper, as I am informed by Dr. O'Donovan, to one of the ancient Firbolgian chieftains of Ireland, and probably brother to *Slainge,* from whom the river Slaney takes its name. Literally, *Banbh* means a Sucking Pig.

Another proof that the bay of Bannow was a tolerably safe and commodious harbour within the times of authentic history, may be drawn from the existence of important and flourishing towns which once adorned its shores. I allude to the towns of Clonmines and Bannow, now utterly extinct. Clonmines was situate nearly at the most inland extremity of the bay, where a gabbard can now barely float at high water. Several ruined castles, and a very fine monastic remain mark its site. Of its history, little has come down to us, in consequence of its having received its incorporation, not from the King, but from the Lords of the Liberty of Wexford; but its ruins prove it to have been of considerable importance, both in a civil and ecclesiastical point of view. Up to the period of the Union its Burgesses (nominal of late years) returned two members to the Irish Parliament.

The town of Bannow was situate on the eastern head-land of the bay.

A ruined church of considerable size, and some few traces of masonry protruding from the drifting sands which cover part of its site, are all that remain to mark its situation. The destructive hand of man seems, however, within the last nine or ten years, to have been busy here; as the Ordnance map of Wexford marks a "castle" to the east of the church, and the account which was published in the second volume of the *Dublin Penny Journal,* p. 32, must have been strangely exaggerated, or many traces of the town were in existence in 1833. The castle is now obliterated, and the very stones removed which marked the foundations of the houses. The famous *chimney* of the Town House, on which the notice of election was wont to be posted—for Bannow also was incorporated, and sent two members to the Irish Parliament in ante-Union times—is represented by a prostrate mass of masonry. It is impossible that this change could have taken place in consequence of the continued rising of the sands; for the town, or at least part of it, stood on a headland of considerable height, with a cliff of slate rock towards the sea, and it is quite impossible that buildings of any size, remaining entire, could be concealed by the comparatively thin stratum of drift-sand which has accumulated on its surface. The Quit-rent Rolls, however, preserved at Wexford, prove the town to have been of considerable importance. They mention, "amongst others, the following streets, viz. :—High-street, Weaver-street, St. George's-street, Upper-street, St. Toolock's-street, St. Mary's-street, St. Ivory's-street, Lady-street, Little-street, &c. Fair slated houses, horse-mills, gardens, and other indications of a prosperous place, are also mentioned as paying Quit-rent."—*Dublin Penny Journal,* Vol. II., p. 32. Some vestiges of the topography of the Borough may perhaps be found in the following extracts from the Inquisitions *post mortem* of the County of Wexford :— A.D. 1616, Sir Dudley Loftus, of Kilclogen, died, seized, amongst numerous other possessions, " of one ruinous castle and one acre of land in Bannow, and Dene's Parke, called Glebeland." A.D. 1627, Hamond Cheevers died, seized, amongst other possessions, " of one burgage in Bannow, which was held of Cheevers and Hollywood in free burgagery." A.D. 1630, Walter Nevell died, seized, amongst other possessions, of " one messuage, called *le Hay,* and one acre of land in the burgagery of Bannow, commonly called *Joane Haye's Acre,*" which were held in burgage tenure." A.D. 1630, Nicholas Hollywood died, seized, amongst other possessions, of " £3 annual rent, issuing out of the burgagery of Bannow," a large rent in those days. A.D. 1633, John Cullen died, seized " of one messuage and 80 acres in Westerhill, and one water-mill in the same, value 16s. annually; also of one messuage and 21 acres in Cullen's land, with the weir called Cullen's weir, one messuage and 12 acres called Hamer's land, one messuage and 12 acres called Hore's land, 5 acres called Cullen's croft, 15 acres in Bally-ellane, 10 acres in Cornewadge, and 15 acres in Grountstown, value 16s. annually," all parcel of the burgage lands of Bannow, and held of the

families of Cheevers and Hollywood. A.D. 1634, Walter Browne died, seized "of one messuage and 30 acres of land part of the burgage lands of Bannow," also held of Cheevers and Hollywood in burgage tenure.—A.D. 1640, Christopher Cheevers died, seized, amongst other large possessions, of " 1 messuage and 30 acres arable land in Newtoune, 1 messuage and 15 acres in Sarrin's lane, 10 acres in *le Cornage,* with another tenement called *le out Cornage,* parcel of the burgage land of Bannow— all held by burgage tenure; also of £4 annual rent issuing from the burgage land and town of Bannow, of 2s. rent of Wimmingstone, 5s. rent of Cullen's Newtoune, 6s. 8d. of Carrig-church, and one load of rushes from Belgrowe, all which are held of the King, by the burgage tenure of Bannow." Many other such items might be given, but I forbear.

That the channel, between Bannow Island and the site of the town, was navigable down to the comparatively late period of 1657, appears on the evidence of the map of the parish in the Down Survey, whereon Bannow Bay is laid down as entered by two deep channels: but the town must have lost its importance long before this period. Of the two channels marked on the Down Survey, but one now exists. The eastern channel is now high and dry, and a road running across the sand far above high-water mark connects the island with the main land. But even if no such record as the Down Survey existed, the very circumstance of an important town having sprung up on its shore would be a sufficient evidence that a deep and navigable arm of the sea once, and that at no very distant period, spread its waters over the space now occupied by firm land or drifting sand hills.

The church of Bannow is now very ruinous, but, notwithstanding much romancing on the subject, it has not suffered in the slightest degree from the encroachment of the drift-sand. It is a plain massive building, consisting of nave and chancel; the former measuring eighteen paces by eight, the latter six paces by nine. It possesses a semicircular Norman chancel-arch of Caen stone, simply chamfered at the angles, with plain imposts and shafts at the western angles of the jambs. The arch measures eleven feet in width, and nine feet to spring of arch. The remainder of the building seems to have been erected during the prevalence of the Early English style, *i.e.,* before 1300, after which a very fine Decorated east window was inserted in the chancel, the mullions of which are now destroyed. The other windows are small and trefoil-headed. In the south side of the nave is a flat-headed doorway, apparently of a date contemporary with the church; the remains of the north and south porches are also extant. The side-walls have plain battlements, and the east gable of the nave is graduated into what are technically termed 'corbie steps.' Within the building lies an extremely elegant sepulchral slab, exhibiting in high relief, beneath two trefoil-headed niches, the heads of a knight and a lady in the costume of the 13th century, together with a rich foliated cross. This slab has been

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usurped by two inscriptions. On the brow of the knight's mailed hood some idle and empty-headed loiterer has carved the letters D.S.S.; whilst, in characters of the latter part of the 15th or beginning of the 16th century, the following sepulchral memorial has also been *incised* on the stone :—

Ḣic. jacet. Joḣanes. Colfer. qui. obiit.   *   *   *   *   *
*   *   Anna. Siggin. que obiit. *   *   *   *   *   *
quorū. animaḃ.' ppicietur. Deus. amen.

There are, as I am informed, about thirty heads of families in the parish of Bannow, who still bear the name of *Culfer,* and scarcely one in any other part of the country. Tradition has it that the first of them was drifted out to sea from the Welsh coast in a goat-skin canoe, and thrown ashore at Bannow. Amongst the inhabitants many Anglo-Norman names still remain, as Barry, Meyler, Stafford, Codde, &c.; but not one *Siggin.* There are a few of the latter name in the barony of Forth, and also a *Sigginstown ; Sigginshaggard* occurs in the neighbourhood of Taghmon. A stone coffin with its coped covering-stone— the latter broken into three fragments—and an uninscribed sepulchral slab, ornamented, as is also the coffin lid, with the peculiar floriated cross of the 13th century, also lie within the walls of the old church, and, with that ruined fane, now form the sole memorials of the town of Bannow and its once busy inhabitants.

THE BAY AND TOWN OF BANNOW.

NO. II.

(COMMUNICATED BY MR. J. C. TUOMEY.)

Possessing an intimate knowledge of this locality for the last fifteen years, and disgusted with the nonsense I frequently heard and read in connection with the " Irish Herculanium," I felt much gratified on perusing the interesting observations of the Rev. James Graves on " the Bay and Town of Bannow," read before the September Meeting of the Kilkenny Archæological Society. Reflecting, however, that Mr. Graves' observations, preserved among the archives of the Kilkenny Archæological Society, may be quoted by antiquaries long after the far future shall have been changed into the past, and feeling confident that I could more minutely describe still existing vestiges of this extinct town, than he has done, I published three letters in the *Wexford Independent,* descriptive of Bannow and its locality. The substance of these letters, at the request of the Rev. Mr. Graves, I now have the honour to present to the Society.

ADDENDUM.

Page 229, after last line add—

Since the foregoing was in print I have been informed by the Rev. James Graves, that Ledwich has committed a twofold mistake in stating that the "Sacri Lusus" was lost, and that the poems were composed *by* the young gentlemen of Kilkenny College. The volume in question is still to be found in Primate Marsh's Library, Class K. 3. Tab. 5. No. 9; and is entitled "Sacri Lusus *In Vsum* Scholæ Kilkenniensis. Dublinii: Typis Regiis, & Venum dantur apud Josephum Wilde. cIɔ Iɔc L. * * *" The date is defective, having been partly cut away by the binder. The book is in small quarto, and is imperfect, ending at p. 64; it consists of Latin poetry in elegiac measure, chiefly on Scripture subjects. On the fly-leaf is written, in an old hand, "Daniel Mead, ex dono Geo. Pigott." On the title, "Mich. Jephson"; whose library was purchased by Primate Marsh.

CORRIGENDA.

p. 117, l. 8, for "Angleasea" read "Anglesea".
p. 133, l. 27, for "these" read "those".
p. 142, l. 34, for "*of*" read "of".
p. 148, note, l. 1, after "Phœnician" dele ,.
p. 157, l. 17, for "*Muillend*" read "*Muilend*".
Ib., l. 24, for "Maelodron" read "Maelodran".
p. 164, l. 11, for "*Muilenu*" read "*Muilenn*".
p. 174, l. 35, for "connection" read "connexion".
p. 177, l. 9, for "*barry of four*" read "*four barrulets*".
p. 182, l. 27, for "Edward" read "Edmond".
p. 187, l. 31, for "twenty-four" read "fourteen".
p. 191, l. 27, after "of" insert "the".
p. 192, l. 37, after "tenure" dele ".
p. 193, ll. 44, 45, for "two trefoil-headed niches" read "a shallow canopy".
p. 195, ll. 14, 22, for "Sugard" read "Ingard".
p. 198, l. 8, for "acre" read "Loftus acre".
Ib., l. 18, for "Ballymagin ' read "Ballymagir".
p. 200, l. 9, after "rain" dele ,.
p. 213, l. 39, for "meta" read "metal".
p. 216, l. 34, for "Vol. I." read "Vol. II".
Ib., l. 35, for "*luaned*" read "*luäued*".
p. 222, l. 15, for "magnificient" read "magnificent".
p. 240, l. 39, after "brothers" dele ".
p. 260, l. 32, for "of Nassau" read "daughter of the first Duke of Beaufort".